Begelman's Rolls-Royce outside his Beverly Hills home last month. A detailing team cleaned the car with Q-Tips even when there was no money for food. *Below:* Begelman and his fourth wife, Annabelle, in Los Angeles, 1990.

FINAL EXPOSURE

Even after *Indecent Exposure* made ousted Columbia Pictures president David Begelman infamous, the charismatic producer went on to run MGM and dazzle Hollywood investors. But that glamour masked a spiral of fraud, which ended only with his suicide in August

BY DAVID McCLINTICK

I had thought that I knew everything there was to know about the bottom, but I was to learn all over again as one learns each time in his life that there is no such thing as the old bottom, and no matter how bad one feels, one can always feel worse.

—Norman Mailer, The Deer Park.

The patrician-looking man in the immaculate gray suit emerged from a taxi and walked through the main entrance of the Century Plaza Tower in Century City. He limped slightly but stood erect and carried a compact navy zipper bag with white trim. After registering in the name of Bruce Vann and paying $290.70 in cash, he was shown to Room 1081. a "Corner King." with a wet bar and windows facing west to the ocean and north to Beverly Hills and the Santa Monica Mountains, which were hazy on this humid Monday afternoon. August 7. 1995.

About an hour later, a middle-aged blonde woman in a white linen shirt and pants picked up a house phone in the lobby.

"Mr. Vann, please."

"Hello."

"I'm here."

"It's Room 1018."

When the elevator doors opened on 10, the woman was surprised to see the man, coatless and tieless, waiting for her in the corridor, laughing. "I gave you the wrong room number," he said. "I can't believe it." It was rare for him to make such mistakes and typical of him to catch them when he did. He took her hand and led her around a corner into Room 1081.

The man who registered as Bruce Vann was actually David Begelman. the scandal-scarred but still-magnetic 73-year-old movie producer, perhaps the most infamous personality of his generation in Hollywood. The woman with him in Room 1081 was Sandi Bennett, the ex-wife of the singer Tony Bennett.

Within hours, Begelman would be dead of a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head. And Bennett would be on the patio of her nearby home, sobbing, wondering if she could have saved him, fearing disclosure that she was apparently the last to see him alive.

It is impossible to describe the circumstances surrounding David Begelman's death—his desperate race against a ticking time bomb of fraud, embezzlement, and imminent personal ruin—without describing his secret love affair with Sandi Bennett. I omitted sex from my book *Indecent Exposure*; it was ubiquitous but irrelevant to the story. It is germane, however, to this account of David Begelman's suicide and the financial scandals that

LEFT, BY MARK LIPSON; RIGHT, BY ALAN BERLINER

prompted it—a story beside which Begelman's earlier rogueries pale.

David Begelman sat at his massive desk in the Thalberg Building and wept. It was noon on Monday. July 12, 1982, and he had just been fired as chairman of United Artists. one of the two principal motion-picture units of the MGM/UA Entertainment Company. The man who fired him. Frank Rothman. MGM/UA's chief executive, had delivered the news and then left Begelman alone with the Muzak in his opulent office.

Rothman's firing of Begelman was ironic—illustrating how executive musical chairs in the small world of Hollywood often turns allies into antagonists. Only four years earlier Frank Rothman had been David Begelman's advocate. When Begelman. as the president of Columbia Pictures in 1977, had been caught forging checks and embezzling money from the corporation, it was Rothman, then a lawyer in private practice. who had been summoned to represent him. Rothman had steered Bcgclman through Columbia's secret internal probe of his thefts, negotiated for him when Columbia surprisingly decided to reinstate him as head of the studio, and negotiated for him again when Columbia reversed course, fired Begelman. and made him an ''independent'' producer. The check forgeries-in the names of the actor Cliff Robertson, the director Martin Ritt. and the restaurateur Pierre Grolcau—had made international headlines and prompted the Los Angeles district attorney to create a task force to probe Hollywood corruption. When Begelman was charged with felony grand theft, it was Frank Rothman who bargained the charge down to a misdemeanor and arranged probation.

Even after their lawyer-client relationship ended, Rothman continued to help Begelman. In late 1979, as the principal lawyer for MGM and its controlling stockholder, Kirk Kerkorian, Rothman urged MGM to hire Begelman to revive its dormant film studio. Hiring a convicted criminal would be controversial, but it had been a year and a half since the Columbia scandal had faded from the newspapers. And Rothman believed the elaborate defense which Begelman and his allies on the Columbia board of directors had devised during the scandal—that his thefts had been "aberrations," reflecting psychiatric problems for which he was being treated. Begelman remained popular in Hollywood. He had displayed a deft hand at Columbia, sponsoring such enormous hits as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *Shampoo*, which had helped rescue the studio from the brink of financial ruin. MGM badly needed such talent.

Although some MGM directors opposed hiring Begelman, Frank Rothman prevailed. "Begelman's back and MGM's got him," gushed the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, recycling the old MGM ad "Gable's back and Garson's got him." Amid great hoopla in the trade press, David Begelman took up his post in the Thalberg Building on MGM's Culver City lot in January 1980—and proceeded to fail with a string of flops that included *Pennies from Heaven*, *Cannery Row*, and *All the Marbles*. MGM bought United Artists in 1981, and Begelman was moved laterally, reportedly against his wishes, to run UA. When Kirk Kerkorian installed Frank Rothman as C.E.O. of the combined companies in February 1982, Begelman's days were numbered.

David Begelman's suicide and the financial scandals that prompted it make a story beside which his earlier rogeries pale.

But after firing Begelman, Frank Rothman again helped save him from unemployment. He recommended him to a cherubic young-man-about-Beverly-Hills named Bruce McNall.

At 32, McNall had grown rich selling ancient coins and artifacts—millions of dollars' worth—to movie moguls and business tycoons. Many of the coins, it turned out, had been smuggled from Turkey, Italy, and Greece, as reported by Bryan Burrough in *Vanity Fair* last year. By the time he met Begelman, McNall was ensconced in a Holmby Hills mansion with a fleet of luxury automobiles.

One of McNall's biggest customers had been Nelson Bunker Hunt, the eccentric Texas oil billionaire, who had gone bankrupt in the early 1980s trying to corner the world's silver market. New opportunities beckoned McNall when the Hunt family expressed a desire to invest in the motion-picture business. To that end McNall and the Hunts formed a company called Sherwood Productions. Their first major ventures were *War Games*, starring Matthew Broderick and Ally Sheedy, and *Blame It on Rio*, starring Michael Caine and Demi Moore. When MGM fired David Begelman in the summer of 1982, McNall immediately hired him to run Sherwood with an annual salary of $50,000.

They got along well—David was avuncular, Bruce boyish—and they shared certain traits. Both were poseurs and lavish, clear-eyed liars. Until he had been unmasked in the Columbia scandal, Begelman had claimed that he had degrees from Yale College and Yale Law School. He had no degrees. McNall's résumé boasted graduate work at Oxford, when in fact he had never ventured beyond U.C.L.A.

With McNall's and the Hunts' backing, David Begelman was able to indulge his instincts for profligacy. He expanded Sherwood's payroll from 5 to 30 people and its office space on the lot at MGM from a small suite to half a floor. (The company soon moved to the palatial headquarters of Bruce McNall's empire, McNall Sports & Entertainment Inc., in Century City.) Begelman increased the budget of *Blame It on Rio* from $6 million to $8 million and signed up another picture, which would be entitled *Mr. Mom*, starring Teri Garr and Michael Keaton.

Sherwood Productions made its international debut at the Cannes Film Festival in May 1983. To promote *Blame It on Rio*, Sherwood took suites at the Hôtel du Cap and entertained foreign distributors on a yacht in the harbor. During a party aboard the yacht, Bruce McNall took aside Frans Afman, the head of entertainment lending at Crédit Lyonnais Bank Nederland (C.L.B.N.), the Dutch subsidiary of the world's largest bank outside Japan. McNall had handed him an envelope allegedly stuffed with what would later be termed, in an affidavit in Los Angeles Superior Court, a "substantial sum of United States currency." Shortly thereafter C.L.B.N. began lending millions of dollars to Sherwood Productions. (Afman could not be reached for comment. He is no longer employed by C.L.B.N.)

The F.B.I. and the Office of the United States Attorney in Los Angeles would label such acts, by both McNall and David Begelman, bribes paid to induce bankers to lend money. It is now known that even earlier in 1983, less than six months after David Begelman joined

Sandi Bennett (photographed in her home in 1995), ex-wife of singer Tony Bennett, spent Begelman's last afternoon at the Century Plaza Tower with him, but had no idea he was about to take his life. *Below:* Room 1081, where he died.

By 1986, Begelman's Gladden Entertainment was being propped up by little more than a massive Ponzi scheme.

the company. McNall was falsifying financial statements and bribing bank officials in order to borrow money—federal felonies.

In 1984. David Beg Iman made a deal with Twentieth Century Fox for it to distribute 10 films of the Gladden Entertainment Corporation (named in honor of Begelman's wife, Gladyce) which had supplanted Sherwood Productions. Based in part on that commitment the European American Bank (E.A.B.) of New York joined C.L.B.N. in providing Gladden with revolving credit of 35 million for film production. Bruce McNall personally guaranteed the loan, submitting false financial statements and inflating his assets and net worth. He falsely stated that he owned a coin collection worth $20 million.

Gladden Entertainment had persistent problems distributing its movies. When Barry Diller took over Fox in late 1984 he summoned Beg Iman and told him Fox wanted out of the distribution deal. Beg Iman resisted, and Gladden got lackluster service from then on. Unable to do deals with the major studios such as Disney and Warner Bros., which shunned him because of his soiled reputation, Begelman was forced to resort to the lesser lights—Cannon, Orion, Carolco.

By 1986, McNall Sports & Entertainment and David Begelman's Gladden Entertainment were being propped up by little more than a massive Ponzi scheme, involving lenders rather than investors. Instead of paying off old investors, McNall and Gladden were paying off old lenders by borrowing money from new lenders under false pretenses. Although his films, which included *The Sicilian*, *Weekend at Bernie's*, and *Mannequin*, rarely did robust business, David Begelman was unrestrained in his spending on overhead and his personal lifestyle. Gladden Entertainment was insolvent by 1986, with a negative net worth of $21.2 million, unable to pay its debts as they fell due. McNall Sports & Entertainment also was insolvent, and was keeping two sets of books.

"Bruce is broke—he's kiting checks," an accountant on the McNall staff began confiding to friends.

On June 27, 1986, David Begelman's wife, Gladyce, died of cancer. The former wife of Lew Rudin, the New York real-estate tycoon, Gladyce was beloved by Begelman's friends. At her funeral she was eulogized by, among others, the actress Suzanne Pleshette and the television producer Annabelle Weston. As the author of *New York on $1,000 a Day*, "Gladyce is already working on her next book, *Heaven on $2,000 a Day*," Weston commented.

By all accounts, David Begelman took her death very hard. He began to talk of suicide, claiming he had a stash of sleeping pills. "Life is hard, death is easy," David would say to Bruce McNall. He said it so often in the coming years that McNall stopped listening.

By 1987, E.A.B. sensed trouble at Gladden Entertainment, and began quietly exploring the possibility of canceling its $20 million share of the film-production loan—but in a way that would not cause Gladden to go bankrupt. Maintained jointly with C.L.B.N., the revolving credit had been increased from $35 million to $60 million. Court papers indicate that McNall and Begelman, together with an E.A.B. officer, devised a scheme to ease E.A.B. out of the revolving- credit agreement and to absolve McNall of all responsibility as guarantor, while concealing the truth from partner C.L.B.N. The plot was complicated and comprised several steps: C.L.B.N. would be told that an independent "investor" was interested in putting $20 million in equity into Gladden's motion-picture program. In fact, the money would come to Gladden circuitously from E.A.B. (An E.A.B. spokesman declined comment.)

Once Gladden had the $20 million in hand, it would pay the money back to E.A.B., thus ending the bank's participation in the combined loan. McNall and his cronies would then try to induce C.L.B.N. to replace E.A.B. and take over the entire commitment based on the appearance that an insolvent Gladden was sufficiently valuable to have attracted a $20 million equity investment from an "independent" source.

According to court papers, McNall and Begelman hatched their scheme with the help of a Swiss lawyer who pretended to represent an investor called Congress Enterprises. As planned, C.L.B.N. was so impressed that it not only took over E.A.B.'s commitment but also extended more credit to Gladden.

As an expression of appreciation, Gladden began providing a Malibu beach house in *(Continued on page 83)*

CENTER AND BOTTOM, BY MARK LIPSON

(Continued from page 74) the summers for C.L.B.N.'s Frans Afman, to whom McNall had allegedly given the cash bribe in 1983. Gladden also hired Afman as a "consultant" at $175,000 a year. McNall bribed a vice president at another bank by paying upwards of $50,000 in credit-card and other bills, which the banker submitted directly to McNall's staff.

As a business, the Gladden Entertainment Corporation was now in free fall. Deals that Begelman had negotiated with Orion and Carolco both collapsed because of those companies' financial difficulties. Fox forced Gladden into a less favorable distribution deal, requiring Bruce McNall to sign a personal guarantee covering any shortfall. David Begelman knew McNall's assets were insufficient to cover the guarantee.

Sandra Grant Bennett, a native of Leesville Louisiana, had arrived in Los Angeles in 1958 al the age of 18, a Flannery O'Connor girl in a Nathanael West town. A southern beauty, she dabbled in modeling and acting for several years until she met Tony Bennett beside the pool of the Beverly Hills Hotel in 1965. A week later she was living with him in New York. They had a daughter, were married, had another daughter, and were separated in 1979. In the early 1980s, in the throes of a bitter, financially debilitating divorce, she dated Gene Kelly. After Gladyce Begelman died in 1986, Sandi took up with David Begelman. He ended the relationship in 1990 to marry Annabelle Weston, the television producer who had given one of the eulogies at Gladyce's funeral. To celebrate the wedding, David flew 125 guests to Las Vegas in two of Bruce McNall's jets. When they arrived at Caesars Palace, he gave each guest a small Prada leather bag containing hundreds of dollars in chips and coins to gamble with.

At the time, David was also celebrating a new, $2 million mortgage—unusually generous—that the Bank of America had given on his house at 705 North Linden Drive in Beverly Hills. Some people would wonder later whether Bruce McNall's close relationship with the Bank of America had affected the size of the mortgage.

The next year, still married to Annabelle, David Begelman resumed his relationship with Sandi Bennett—this time in secret. Addicted to high living, and now strapped financially, David and Sandi spiraled downward together.

In much the way he had crossed the wrong man when he forged Cliff Robertson's name on a check, David Begelman crossed the wrong man when he began stealing money from Sidney Kimmel. A member of the Forbes Four Hundred, with a net worth exceeding $300 million, Kimmel had grown rich building the Jones Apparel Company into one of the nation's leading women's-clothing companies. In 1982, Kimmel had decided to invest $3 million in *Blame It on Rio*. Under his contract, Kimmel was entitled to 50 percent of the movie's proceeds.

By 1991, Kimmel had recovered about $1.9 million of his $3 million investment, leaving him $1.1 million from breakeven. Gladden Entertainment, insolvent and awash in fraud, was grabbing money anywhere it could find it. It would later be alleged that David Begelman, with the knowledge of C.L.B.N., was diverting income from *Blame It on Rio* to three other movies, of which Sherwood owned 100 percent. The main beneficiary of the scheme was C.L.B.N.; the illicitly obtained money allowed Gladden to pay more on its C.L.B.N. debt load, which was metastasizing. Such arrangements seemed to make sense to Frans Afman. As Afman told *Forbes* magazine in 1988, "Bankers should avoid working with crooks and ignorant people. But if you have a choice, I'd rather work with a crook because he can steal from someone else to repay his bank." (A spokesman from C.L.B.N. denied any wrongdoing by the bank.)

Kimmel didn't learn of Begelman's scheme until late 1994—when he also learned something more alarming about a second business relationship with David Begelman. In 1993, Kimmel had agreed to invest $2 million annually for five years—$10 million in all—in a multi-picture production arrangement which Begelman had organized involving MGM, Live Entertainment, and Rank Film Distributors. The partners would be doing business with a new company, Gladden Productions, which Begelman created alongside the insolvent Gladden Entertainment. Begelman's partnership with Kimmel and the others was supposed to produce two pictures a year. Bruce McNall agreed to put $35 million into the partnership over the five years. Of course, McNall didn't have $35 million, and Begelman knew it.

On September 1, 1993, Sidney Kimmel's first $2 million investment was deposited in the bank account of Gladden Productions. Before the end of the day,

Play
this book
loud.
Robert Palmer, the acclaimed New York Times and Rolling Stone rock critic, celebrates the history of Rock & Roll in a book as inventive, unsettling and infectious as the music itself.
This companion volume to the new PBS series explores rock's complex roots and branchings—from blues and gospel to reggae, punk and rap. For those who've ever rocked, and for those who still rock on, Rock & Roll: An Unruly History salutes you.
Rock & Roll
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David Begelman wrote himself a check for $1 million against the Gladden account, which he controlled, and deposited it in two personal accounts at the City National Bank in Los Angeles. Within weeks he moved another $900,000 to another personal account, at the Bank of America. Gladden Productions, meanwhile, was not producing any movies under its contract with Kimmel.

Having secretly misappropriated nearly all of Kimmel's $2 million, David Begelman flew to New York in late 1993 and informed Kimmel that Bruce McNall was mired in financial difficulty and would be unable to invest as planned. Would Kimmel consider increasing his investment?

Kimmel, busy with his apparel business, deferred his decision until 1994.

"Guess where I am." David Begelman asked Sandi Bennett from the phone in his Rolls.

"Where?"

"I'm at a gas station on Santa Monica Boulevard and Beverly Glen. Are you north or south of Wilshire?"

"South," she said. If one was rom Beverly Hills, "south of Wilshire" was the wrong side of town.

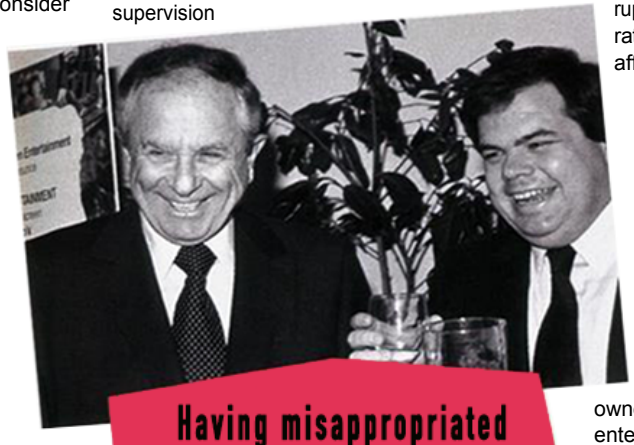
It was Valentine's Day 1994. Bennett had been forced by financial difficulties to give up her home at 713 North Canon Drive in Beverly Hills, where she had lived for years. She had moved to an apartment at the end of January, and Begelman had paid a private detective to get her unlisted number.

Now she told him the address, and then went outside with the portable phone to coach him north on the winding avenue. "Keep coming, keep coming," she said from the sidewalk in front of her building. The green Rolls eased into view. She waved. Like children with toy walkie-talkies, they spoke into their phones and laughed as he pulled to a stop and she got into the car. They rode for a while and he brought her back. She couldn't invite him in; there were people in the apartment.

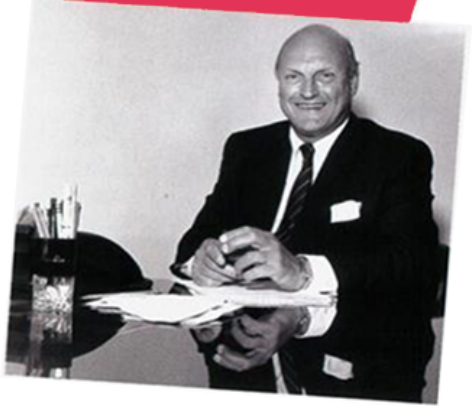
Two weeks later David Begelman resigned as president of Gladden Entertainment when the three major Hollywood talent guilds—the Screen Actors Guild, the Directors Guild, and he Writers Guild—accused Gladden of failing to pay their members $4.2 million in back residuals. In April, Gladden Entertainment was finally forced to declare bankruptcy. The resourceful David Begelman, however, was now concentrating fully on his new company, Gladden Productions.

On the evening of Monday, April 20, 1994, Special Agents Patricia Rose and John Orr of the F.B.I. rang the doorbell at 705 North Linden Drive. Begelman invited them in and, with his usual aplomb, summoned the cook to offer drinks, which the agents declined.

As Rose and Orr questioned Begelman, other agents from the F.B.I., under the supervision of Special Agents Patricia Chamberlin and Sharon Elkins, fanned out across Los Angeles, serving federal subpoenas on the high command of the Bruce McNall empire. The subpoenas arrived like a sudden storm in the spring night, signaling the beginning of a federal criminal investigation of the McNall companies, including Gladden Entertainment. By May, McNall, too, was forced into bankruptcy, and later in the year would be indicted for and plead guilty to bank fraud, wire fraud, and conspiracy. As part of the plea agreement, McNall promised to cooperate with federal prosecutors, as well as with the bankruptcy trustee conducting a separate investigation of his tangled affairs, R. Todd Neilson, a prominent C.P.A. and former F.B.I. agent, and Neilson's attorney, Leonard L. Gumport.



Having misappropriated nearly all of Stanley Kimmel's $2 million, Begelman asked him to consider increasing his investment.



Top: **Begelman, left, and partner Bruce McNall at Chasen's in 1985.** ***Above:*** **Frans Afman (here in his office in 1991) allegedly accepted a cash bribe so his bank would lend them money.**

Though his infrastructure was crumbling, the façade that David Begelman had constructed throughout his life remained remarkably intact. Showing no strain, he still hosted dinner parties at Drai's, a fashionable Los Angeles restaurant in which he owned an interest. At lunch he entertained friends such as Billy Wilder at the same corner table of the Beverly Wilshire Hotel. One could not pick up a check with David Begelman. No check was ever presented; at his instruction it was simply totaled out of sight of his guests, a 20 percent tip was added, and it was put on his tab. This was "the Begelman touch." familiar to his old friends since they had dined at Danny's Hide-a way and the Colony in New York in the 60s.

Unbeknownst to even his closest friends, however, David Begelman was hurtling through the last months of his life like a fugitive on the run. As of November 1, 1994, he could no longer make the $15,000 monthly payments on his Beverly Hills house required by his mortgage with the Bank of America. On November 14, he borrowed $125,000 from his former MGM boss, Kirk Kerkorian, to pay personal debt, but he did not use the funds for his mortgage payments.

In December, Sidney Kimmel's representatives confronted Begelman with his theft of $2 million. He said he would repay the money, and promised to put up his house, art collection, and jewelry as security. Kimmel

TOP, BY MICHAEL JACOBS; BOTTOM, BY HAROLD SWEET

waited. Begelman did nothing, and disappeared for days at a time.

Beginning in January 1995, Kimmel's legal advisor Barry Goldin, an attorney in Allentown, Pennsylvania, quietly deployed a pincer formation of Century City litigators against Begelman. One group began a suit seeking to trace the $2 million Begelman had stolen from Kimmel in 1993; the other group probed Begelman's diversion of money from Kimmel's share of *Blame It on Rio* and accused C.L.B.N. and E.A.B. of complicity in fraud. Both groups of lawyers were ordered to try to keep their efforts out of the newspapers. They succeeded.

On January 20, a lawyer for Kimmel persuaded Los Angeles Superior Court judge Diane Wayne to appoint a receiver to look into the handling of revenues from *Blame It on Rio*. On January 26, two other Kimmel lawyers began a lawsuit against Gladden Productions, charging David Begelman with fraud and conspiracy. On February 2, Begelman was personally served with court papers.

On February 17, the Bank of America foreclosed on Begelman's home mortgage, which he had not paid since October, and demanded $63,833.65 in back payments and late charges. Begelman did not pay. Nor did he pay his gambling debts—thousands of dollars he owed to his buddies in a fabled Friday-afternoon poker game. The poker group was perhaps the most important social nexus of Begelman's life and dated back decades. It included Walter Matthau, the director Stanley Donen, Michael Chow of Mr. Chow's restaurant, and the real-estate tycoon Asher Dann. In February of 1995, Begelman was evicted from the poker group. A friend estimated that he was losing $300,000 a year at poker and $100,000 a year at gin. "David, it's just not fun with you here anymore," one of the members said.

On February 27, Judge Wayne, now presiding over both *Blame It on Rio* and the $2 million theft, ordered Begelman to give Kimmel's lawyers immediate access to his books and records, which had been moved to the offices of Begelman's accountant Fred Altman. Bearing a court order, Adrianne J. Brownstein, a lawyer for Kimmel, went to Altman's office but was refused access until the next day.

In March, Sidney Kimmel's lawyers accused David Begelman of perjuring himself in official court papers. In April, Judge Wayne appointed a receiver to investigate Begelman's thefts from Kimmel. The receiver was Philip J. Hacker, a tough Century City C.P.A. who cialized in "fraud audits." In May, Hacker sued Begelman for fraud and conspiracy and accused him of malice and "despicable conduct."

Meanwhile, the *Blame It on Rio* litigators also began to envelop Begelman in May and June. Attorney Barry Goldin accused Begelman and C.L.B.N. of improper conduct, alleged that senior C.L.B.N. officers had solicited bribes, and noted that the bank's activities were being investigated by the French legislature as well as a federal grand jury under the supervision of the United States Attorney in Los Angeles. The tenacious Goldin also subpoenaed C.L.B.N.'s attorneys Loeb and Loeb for documents concerning "any and all bribes, kickbacks, [and] gratuities" that might have been paid by Begelman and his people to E.A.B., C.L.B.N.'s predecessor in the *Blame It on Rio* loan. (A spokesman for C.L.B.N. characterized Goldin's accusations as "malicious and unsubstantiated.")

Unbeknownst to even his closest friends, Begelman was hurtling through the last months of his life like a fugitive on the run

After acknowledging in December that he had taken the $2 million and was obligated to repay it, Begelman claimed in May that the money had actually been intended as his salary for running Gladden Productions. Kimmel's lawyers immediately destroyed that argument by pointing out that there were no records of salary payments and no tax forms. Nor was there any provision for salary in Begelman's contract with Kimmel. The money wasn't a loan, either. There was no loan agreement, no repayment schedule, no promissory note.

In late June, Receiver Philip Hacker's lawyer Michael Dempsey asked the court to issue a so-called writ of attachment against David Begelman's remaining assets—his house, his art collection, watch collection, stamp collection, and his interest in Drai's restaurant. If the court granted the writ, Hacker would be able to seize the assets. Meanwhile, Begelman was summoned to F.B.I. headquarters in Los Angeles for further questioning.

"Would you mind, old boy, writing a check to me for $15.000?" David Begelman asked a close friend in July. "I will give you a check postdated by three weeks." The friend obliged without question. Begelman borrowed from three others for a total of $60,000. On Thursday, July 27, the court approved the writ of attachment requested by the Gladden receiver.

As his pursuers closed in during late July, David Begelman incredibly was still summoning the poise to wheel and deal in the motion-picture business. There had been a time when Begelman's important meetings had been held in his office, at *his* convenience; if he had deigned to go to someone else's office, an aide had accompanied him. Now Begelman was going to other people's offices alone. And in July he had managed tentatively to cobble together still another film deal, whereby MGM and Live Entertainment would distribute films presumably to be made by Gladden Productions. Foreign distribution would be handled by a company called Largo Entertainment, a subsidiary of the Japanese conglomerate JVC. Begelman had been negotiating for Largo's services with its attorney Bruce Vann.

On the afternoon of Monday, July 31, David Begelman sat in Largo's offices on the ninth floor of 2029 Century Park East concluding his arrangements with Vann and the chairman of Largo, Barr Potter.

As the meeting was ending, Begelman asked th em if, in addition to their new business arrangement, Largo could possibly extend him an "advance" of $200,000. They politely said no; Largo made no such accommodations for anyone.

"Well, maybe I'll ask somebody else," Begelman mused.

That Friday, August 4, the clerk of Los Angeles Superior Court dispatched the writ of attachment to the sheriff of Los Angeles County to attach the property of David Begelman. Loss of his house, art, and other assets seemed imminent.

His family and friends noticed no uncharacteristic behavior, no false notes, over the weekend. Gladyce's daughter, Beth Rudin DeWoody, was in town with her children. David took everybody to dinner.

"I'll be in my office in 15 minutes," David Begelman said to Sandi Bennett over the phone from home. "Call me there." It was late morning, August 7.

A lifelong aficionado of fancy offices, David Begelman had fallen a long way. As president of Gladden Entertainment, he had occupied a lavish office at 10100 Santa Monica Boulevard with two secretaries. Now he worked at 1888 Century Park East, sharing space, like a peddler at a flea market, with assorted people and entities. In place of a secretary he used an answering machine. But he still drove a Rolls.

When Sandi reached David at his office, he sounded distracted. "Call me back in 15 minutes," he said.

"How are you?" she asked him 20 minutes later. "Is everything O.K.?"

"Terrible." It was his usual response lately. But this time it was more serious. "She asked me to move out."

Sandi had assumed it was something at home. Annabelle had confronted David about their affair months earlier, and the tension had steadily mounted. "I'm sorry she's giving you a hard time," she said. "Is there anything I can do?"

"How are you?" he asked, deflecting her. "That's what I wanted to know—how you were."

David's calls to Sandi had becomes more frequent. She sensed something was wrong, but knew he wouldn't want to go into it. He had never confided much in her. And this wasn't the time to be persistent.

"I'm fine," she said.

"O.K., I'll call you tomorrow."

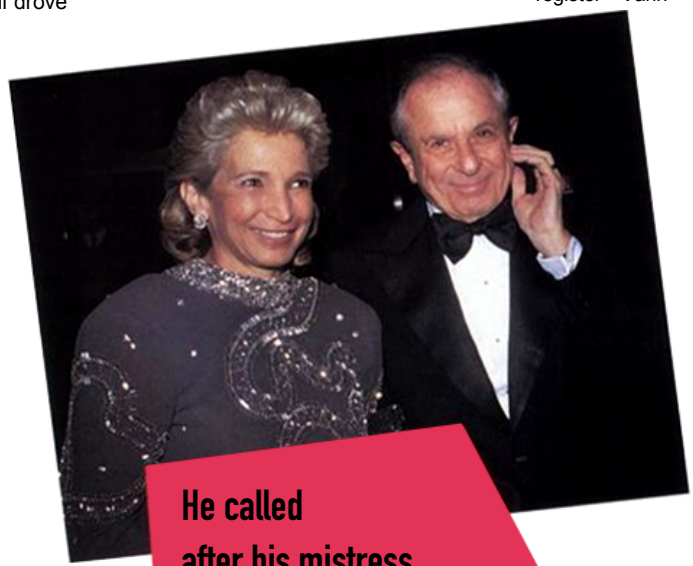
David called Sandi again an hour later. "Would it be possible for you to meet me in 20 minutes?"

"I can't make it that soon," she told him, still in her bathrobe, having spent the morning working on a painful chapter about her marriage to Tony Bennett in the book she's writing about her life. "Give me an hour."

The mood in Room 1081 at the Century Plaza Tower was different from anything David and Sandi had ever experienced with each other. Ordinarily their time together was light and fun. That afternoon, it was awkward. Each had come with an unspoken agenda. David seemed thinner, more vulnerable, and more fragile than when they had rendezvoused in the first-floor guest room at his home the previous Thursday, and when they had met in a room at the Century Plaza the week of Sandi's birthday, July 7.

Curious as to whether he had arranged for the room today because he wanted to be with her or because of Annabelle's actions, she asked, "Have you moved in?" But he brushed off her questions and as usual turned the conversation back to her.

"Sandi, you've given me enormous pleasure over the years," he said as they lay together, the shades drawn against the afternoon sun. "I thank you." David could be both formal and intimate at the same time.



He called after his mistress, "You *must* remember that I'm saying 'God bless you.'"

Begelman and his third wife, Gladyce, in the mid-70s. He was devastated by her death in 1986 and began talking of suicide then.

"But, David, I love you."

"I've known you loved me, but I don't know why."

"I wanted to. It gave me pleasure, too."

At one time Sandi had yearned to be Mrs. David Begelman. But in recent weeks, as David had reached out to her more and more, she felt herself pulling back.

"Sandi, if there are any promises I ever made to you that I did not keep, it was because it was impossible, not intentional. I want you to understand that."

"I know."

As he spoke, David kept patting Sandi's hand.

"You'd better go," he told her. "You were working and I have work to do."

"Well, maybe I'll go and maybe I won't," she said, toying with him.

"No, you can go," he said, refusing to play.

As she gathered her things to leave, she noticed the small piece of paper on which she had written the name he had used to register—Vann

"Well, I don't need this anymore, Mr. Vann!" she said, tearing the note and tossing it into the trash.

"No, no, Sandi," he said, reaching down and carefully picking the pieces out of the wastebasket, "take it home and throw it away when you get home, O.K.?"

He guided her to the door. "God bless you, Sandi."

"God bless you, too, David."

He stood in the open door as she walked down the hall. "You have to remember that, Sandi," he called after her. "You *must* remember that I'm saying 'God bless you.'"

He closed the door. It was 3:30. He dialed producer Freddie Fields, who wasn't in. At 4:30, he called his friend Danny Welkes, a talent manager whom he had known for 40 years, and said he was sending a pouch by messenger.

"There are some letters. Would you please see that they get to the proper people?" "Sure, David. What is this about?"

"Will you be home tonight, Danny?"

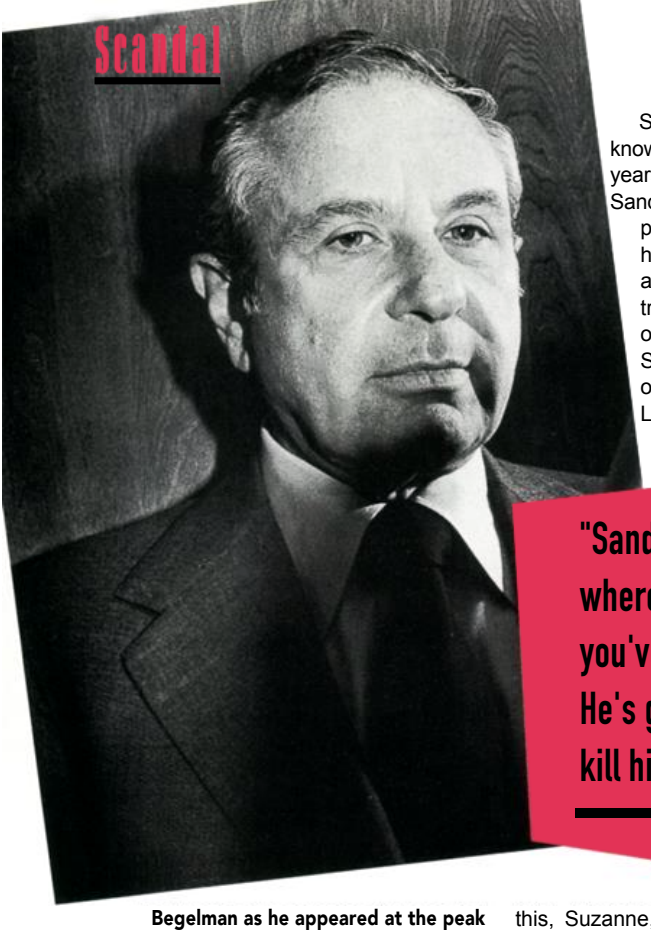
"Yes."

"I'll call you later."

Back at her desk, troubled by her time with David, Sandi Bennett found she couldn't concentrate on her writing. On impulse she drove across the hills to Sherman Oaks and dropped in on her sister and brother-in-law. She stayed for an early dinner.

Just after six o'clock, David Begelman summoned a bellman to Room 1081, gave him his bag, and instructed him to keep it at the concierge desk. A friend would pick it up the next day, Begelman said. He called Danny Welkes again at 8:30 and asked whether the pouch

PETER C. BORSARI



"Sandi, if you know where he is, you've got to tell me. He's going to kill himself."

Begelman as he appeared at the peak of his power, in Los Angeles in 1978.

he had spoken of earlier had arrived.

"No, it hasn't."

"Well, it will get there, and when it does, please see that the letters get to the appropriate people. I would appreciate that. And, most important, please make sure Annabelle gets her letter."

"Where are you, David? Are you O.K.?"

"Sure, everything's fine, Dan. Everything's fine."

"Where are you, David?" Welkes asked insistently. "I have to see you."

Begelman hung up. In a panic, Welkes called Annabelle Begelman, who, it turned out, was also frantic because she had just found out that David's gun was missing. Welkes summoned Suzanne Pleshette, who lives in the same building, and they hurried across town to Begelman's house.

Sandi Bennett's phone was ringing when she returned from Sherman Oaks.

"Sandi, it's Suzanne. Do you know where David is?" Sandi winced.

"Sandi, if you know where he is, you've got to tell me. He's going to kill himself."

Sandi and Suzanne had known each other for many years. On New Year's Day, Sandi had served black-eyed peas to Suzanne and her husband, Tommy Gallagher, a southerner who liked the traditional dish and was the only person in Hollywood Sandi knew who had heard of her hometown, Leesville, Louisiana.

"Don't tell me this, Suzanne," Sandi was saying on the phone. "You can't tell me this."

"I have to. I just took a shot. I thought you might know where he is."

"I know where he was—this afternoon. The Century Plaza."

"Danny Welkes will go and get him."

"Oh, God, I'll have to lead him there," Sandi said. "He's under a false name, and I don't remember the name or the room number." It was agreed that Welkes and Pleshette would come for Bennett and they would go together to the hotel.

First, however, Welkes and Pleshette waited as Annabelle Begelman dialed the Century Plaza. The switchboard operator routed her call to the hotel's security dispatcher. It was 9:56.

The dispatcher could hear her desperation. Her husband, David Begelman, was despondent, she said. He might have checked into the hotel under another name and might be on the verge of suicide. Overcome by tears, Annabelle turned the phone over to Danny Welkes, who added that they man they were looking for had paid cash. Welkes offered two names which he said Begelman sometimes assumed. The hotel computer displayed neither name. Welkes described their man: six feet one, slender, with gray hair, gray suit. The dispatcher promised to inquire and call back. Hotels are cautious in such situations. People who pay cash for rooms usually have nonsuicidal motives and do not want their privacy invaded. But this call sounded authentic.

Sandi Bennett waited for what seemed a long time in front of her apartment on Beverly Glen. Welkes and Pleshette finally arrived in Welkes's small Mercedes. The hotel was no more than five minutes away.

Leaving the car at the Tower entrance with a Beefeater-costumed doorman, the three hurried to the elevators and rode to the 10th floor. Sandi Bennett bolted off the elevator, rushed down a corridor, and began pounding on a door, yelling, "David, it's Sandi, please open the door!" The door opened to reveal a surprised woman. It was the wrong room. Sandi Bennett was hopelessly confused. She could remember neither the room number nor the name Begelman had used. She grabbed the house phone at the 10th-floor elevator and pleaded with the operator, "We're looking for a man with the last name of Rapp or Mann or some name with a double last letter!" The operator was unable to help.

Bennett hung up, retraced her steps, and this time remembered that it was Room 1081 where she had met Begelman earlier. She pounded on the door and again shouted, "David, please open the door, it's Sandi!" as Welkes and Pleshette stood by. There was no response to her repeated cries. The do not disturb sign hung on the doorknob.

It was 10:20. Bennett, Welkes, and Pleshette took the elevator back to the lobby and hurried to the registration desk. The assistant manager, who had been informed of Annabelle Begelman's call, was conferring with the hotel security supervisor and canvassing check-in records, as well as questioning desk clerks who might recall registering a man fitting the description Welkes had given.

David Begelman's three friends told the assistant manager they had now established that the man they were looking for was, or at least had been, in Room 1081. None of the hotel staff knew the name David Begelman, but they instantly recognized Suzanne Pleshette, whose celebrity added credibility to her claim that Begelman was a producer—an important man in the motion-picture industry—and was despondent. Peering at a computer screen, the assistant printed out the record of Room 1081's use that day. Seeing the name Bruce Vann, the name Begelman had checked in under, the assistant man-

ager hesitated, and then told the three friends that the name of the man in the room did not match any of the names Begelman was known to have used. The assistant manager did notice the cash payment, however.

He dialed the room. No answer.

The security supervisor and an aide went to the elevators.

The concierge escorted Welkes, Pleshette, and Bennett into a private office and made sure they were comfortable.

After banging on the door of Room 1081, the security supervisor told the dispatcher through his walkie-talkie, "We're entering 1081."

Using his master key, the officer released the lock. The door opened into a hallway which led past the bathroom and bar before widening into the room. A king-size bed was to the right.

A man, his head propped on pillows, was lying on the bed in a white hotel bathrobe. He was bleeding from two wounds in his head—an entrance wound in his right temple and an exit wound above his left ear. An expended round from a .38-caliber pistol was lodged in the headboard to his left. The gun was in his right hand. He was dead.

Beside him lay a sheet of paper, with an expansive scrawl and the words "My real name is David Begelman."

Like the hotel staff, the L.A.P.D. detectives who showed up two hours later did not recognize the name David Begelman. However, in the bag that Begelman had entrusted to the concierge they found his address book, a Who's Who of Hollywood for the last half of the 20th century. The detectives also found several letters—farewell notes to family and friends—the contents of which would be the subject of much speculation in Hollywood during the weeks to come.

"Bruce McNall is cutting me in half," Begelman had written to Freddie Fields, alluding to the fear that the F.B.I. and federal prosecutors might be building a criminal case against him with McNall's cooperation. In his note to Danny Welkes, Begelman had asked that there be no funeral or memorial service, and that his ashes be turned over to Elliott Kastner, a motion-picture producer with whom Begelman had had a rocky relationship. "Just kidding," Begelman had added, his sense of humor intact to the end. (Elliott Kastner owns the screen rights to *Indecent Exposure*, which examined the Begelman check-forgery scandal and ensuing power struggle at Columbia Pictures.)

Arriving home by taxi from the Century Plaza after midnight, Sandi Bennett sat up the rest of the night, weeping and consumed by guilt. Broadcast reports of David Begelman's suicide and curiosity-seeking telephone calls to Sandi began around 5:30. The calls continued into the afternoon, when she drove to Sunset Plaza to have her nails done. Back home in the early evening, ignoring warnings from a Begelman intimate not to speak to the press, she chatted briefly with George Rush of the *New York Daily News*, denying rumors that she had been in Begelman's room before he died. "If I am the other woman in people's imagination, so be it," she said. "I can't say I didn't care about him. I did. I can't say we didn't get together. But I know this: He loved his wife very much. He wanted his marriage to be successful. I wanted that, too."

Sandi drove to La Jolla Tuesday night to be with another man. When she returned to Los Angeles late Thursday, she roamed her darkened apartment listening over and over and over to a CD of her ex-husband and the great jazz pianist Bill Evans: ". . . it's a heartache, either way, but beautiful. . . "

The Beverly Hills rumor mill worked overtime: David Begelman had showered before he shot himself; David Begelman had died owing $2 million to bookies and gangsters; the answering machine in Begelman's office contained a sexy message from Sandi Bennett. There were jarring incongruities. A friend paying her respects at the house on Linden Drive learned that there had been no money in the house for food in weeks. And yet a team of car "detailers" kept its regular appointment to polish the details on Begelman's Rolls with Q-Tips.

On Friday, despite Begelman's instructions, a memorial service was held at his home. Around 100 people attended —including Freddie and Corinna Fields, Suzanne Pleshette, Danny Welkes, Michael Chow, Victor Drai of Drai's, and Constance Danielson, who was David Begelman's business secretary from the late 60s until 1989. It was an odd mixture of people—"neither here nor there," as one participant described it—and the tone was uneasy, with people reluctant to jump in and give David a last hurrah. The stories were mild—not the vintage classics of badness and brilliance that would have amused him.

He would have been amused, however, that *Variety* put his obituary above that of Jerry Garcia. ☐

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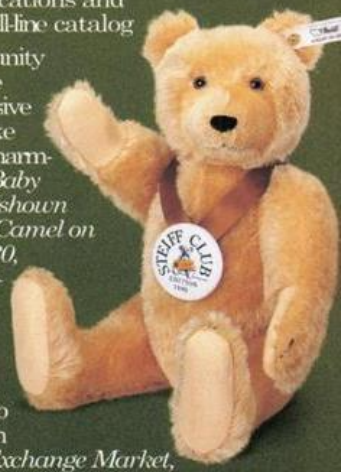

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